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## THE SOCIAL WORK OF A CHURCH IN A FACTORY TOWN

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The primary mission of a church is the worship of God and the social service of man. The first part of this great mission is not to be discussed in this paper. It is well, however, to bear it in mind, for the church does a noble work when it gives expression to the religious aspirations of the soul, makes clear the sanctions of the moral life, maintains a worthy ideal, and keeps alive the immortal hopes which make us men. The realization of its great ideal necessarily impels it to enter upon the service of man.

There are two ways in which different churches seek to do this service. Some try to build themselves into great institutions or to maintain their authority over the institutions they found. Others endeavor to inspire and urge the men and women identified with them to work for social betterment through institutions and in connection with movements which are not under direct ecclesiastical control. The aim of the one group of churches is to make ecclesiastical workers, the aim of the other group is to make social servants.

The latter was the ideal which the minister had when he became the pastor of the church, which he had the honor to serve for eight years. The community in which it was located was a typical New England factory town. The chief industry was the manufacture of shoes. There were a half dozen larger factories which employed several hundred men and women. There were small stores and markets, and the usual clubs and organizations. The church attendants and members were working people, the business men of the town, and the clerks and men who did business in Boston, and several school teachers. The intellectual and moral character of the place was up to the average standard of such towns. There were four churches, a Catholic, Methodist, Unitarian and Congregational.

The first task that presented itself was the creation of intellectual interests in the life of the young people. From the minister's own experience previously as a workingman he knew full well that

one of the best ways to save young people from the pursuit of frivolous pleasures and to make their leisure hours opportunities for culture, rather than temptations for vain things, was to create in them an earnest desire for the best things of the mind. He addressed them one Sunday evening on the joys of reading, and to his great delight some of them asked him to give them more specific suggestions concerning courses of reading, and methods of study. He volunteered to be their leader and pursued this method: The best essays or books of certain authors were chosen for the month's reading at home. They then met together, had a paper on the life of the author, and a discussion of the selected book or essay. They had nine meetings a year. During the years of his pastorate they studied, in this way, the greater American authors, some English writers of the nineteenth century, some plays of Shakespeare, the "Divine Comedy" of Dante, the history of art, and some of the great cities of the world, as Athens, Rome, Jerusalem, Alexandria, etc.

Two or three results were realized: the young men and women had serious interests in life, they began the formation of private libraries, and made larger use of the public library, they carried new and vital thought into their religious services, and brought their minds to church. The reality of their interest is proved by the fact that the reading circle continues to this day, and has a larger number in it than at its formation seventeen years ago.

The second social task that presented itself was the creation of a sympathetic relation between the forces of capital and labor. This is a difficult problem in a small town, where the employers and employees are attendants or members of the same church, but the difficulty is offset by the opportunity their presence in the church gives the minister. The same conditions obtained there as elsewhere. Some of the employers had had their sorry experiences with unreasonable labor leaders, which made them bitter towards labor unions and working men. The working people had their prejudices against the employers. The problem was to make prevail the kindlier relations of human brotherhood. In a small community it is easier to do this than in a city. The men meet more frequently, are in the same lodges, and go to the same churches. They know one another as human beings as well as industrial classes.

Frontal attack in times of strikes may be necessary now and again. When the community faces a grave moral crisis the preacher must speak or else forever after hold his peace. But these crises are infrequent, and the frontal attack not often necessary. The better way is to take advantage of natural occasions for the enforcement of great truths. No Labor Day ever passed by without the preacher taking advantage of the occasion for the presentation of some phase of the industrial situation and the duties of employers and employees. And the usual ministration from Sunday to Sunday, when one has a social message to preach, affords sufficient opportunity for the creation of a new feeling of brotherhood.

The question of license or no license made its appearance annually. The town had only recently voted no license. It was a hard struggle to make this social gain. The task before the churches and temperance forces and good citizens was the enforcement of the law which was the expression of the will of the majority. This was most difficult. The margin for no license was not large, and there was hope on one side and fear on the other that the town would go back to license. The ordinary officers were lax in their duty and the courts resorted to small fines when convictions were gained.

The first thing was to combine all the men who were opposed to the saloon. It was no easy task to get the extreme temperance folk to concentrate their efforts on this objective. There was much splendid union work of all the churches in the several parts of the town. The leading citizens, irrespective of their church affiliations, united and worked for the enforcement of the law. It fell to the clergy to secure the facts of the violation of the law. It would have been better if the laity had done more of this. Here the social work was not new. There was no special initiative on the part of this church. It worked with others, and asked no questions as to priority of suggestion. It requires much grace to do this. In spite of some local interests, party bosses and cruel cupidity, the temperance problem was solved as far as no license and vigorous enforcement of the law can do this.

The problem of the right administration of charity confronted the church and the minister. The current need for relief was not great, though in exceptional years when there was little work, the need increased. There were, in addition, the usual cases of the

sick, the unfortunate, the children without adequate care, and the persons who needed some help in addition to the income derived from their own efforts. There was an abundance of charitable sentiment and generosity. There were numerous King's Daughters' Circles and large-hearted men in the community. The only need was to direct this in the right way. There was no little overlapping by the circles, churches and individuals. The minister was fortunate enough to have received instruction under Professor Tucker, then in Andover Seminary.

While it was not thought necessary to create additional machinery for the wise distribution of relief, the spirit and methods of the Associated Charities were put into operation with good results to all parties concerned. Another social task was the co-ordination of the church and the other institutions and social forces of the community. This is one of the most necessary things, and yet seldom done. It is also one of the most delicate things to do. The churches are often indifferent, or suspicious, or antagonistic to other social agencies.

There was, in the first place, the problem of getting the church and the lodges in sympathetic relations. Some good people thought these lodges the agencies of Satan. Some in the lodges thought their order the greatest institution in society. These two classes of people make it difficult to coordinate the church and the lodge. The first thing necessary was to see the real good in these orders, the social ends they served and the good work they did to their members in times of sickness and trouble. Whenever the minister had the opportunity to speak, either in private or in public, it was his custom to urge the members to live up to the ideals of their lodges. He never became a member of any lodge, but he was in sympathetic relation with all of them. A kindly feeling between the church and these orders was created and frequently there was practical cooperation in social work for persons in need.

Again, there was the public school, with which the church should be in closest relation. Coordination here was brought about by the recognition that the public school cannot do everything. It is not intended to take the place of the home and the church and the will of the individual. The minister in New England has always felt, when true to the best traditions, that he must stand for the best possible public school. Here, as nowhere else, his calling and

his citizenship have been in close agreement. One was only following in the footsteps of worthy predecessors, therefore, in going to the town meeting and urging adequate school appropriation and fair treatment of the teachers. As a preacher he always rejoiced in the opportunity the opening or the closing of the schools gave him to speak from the pulpit of their service to the community, and to urge the parents to keep the children at school as long as possible, and to fire the boys and girls with the ambition to go through the high school and not stop with the grammar grade, and if they went through the high school to take a collegiate course. Perhaps the fact of his having done the same under much difficulty had some influence in creating a trend toward the colleges, which has increased with the passing years.

The church and the political forces were brought into closer relation. The church could not, of course, enter into relations with particular parties, even though it were the Prohibition party. The church, as an ecclesiastical organization, cannot, or rather should not, enter politics. History has many things to teach on this matter. Yet the social work of the church must in some way be related to the civic duties of men and their organized political efforts. The task of the church is to make the political forces clean and constructive. This is no easy matter. Oftentimes the party leaders are in the church. They are most sensitive to the criticism of their party. It is hard for them to see the faults of their own party, while they readily see the faults of the other.

The first thing to do was preach fearlessly against moral evils in any party. This was the first condition for influence. The preacher must prove his fearlessness of the politician. Then he insisted that the men of his church who belonged to the different parties should do their political duties. He urged their attendance at caucuses; excused them from church services to attend; and frequently changed the hour of church services that he might attend himself. In like manner, he urged the duty of going to the town meeting. While the church did not become a power in the politics of the town, the church people did.

Another task was to get the churches into right relations with one another. The churches in a small town are often kept apart by jealousy, fear, prejudice, family troubles and doctrinal differences. Yet the union of the churches is most necessary for effective

social work. The ministers of the Protestant churches felt the first thing to do was to try to get their churches to know one another better, and they agreed to preach to their respective congregations on a specified Sunday on the good they found in the other churches. The people were surprised at the rich discoveries. It was afterwards easy to hold not only union Thanksgiving services, but also union services on the great calendar days of the Christian year. And on one occasion all the churches, both Protestant and Catholic, united in the interests of temperance, in a great mass meeting, in the largest hall. It was a great occasion, and did much good not only for the cause of temperance, but also for good brotherly feeling. A new spirit took possession of the people, with the result that when the A. P. A. movement struck the town it found only a few supporters. The community was immune to this undemocratic and un-Christian evil.

Here the record of social work for eight years ends.